

VZCZCXYZ0005
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSI #0088/01 0221606
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 221606Z JAN 08
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8649
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L TBILISI 000088

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/22/2018
TAGS: PGOV PHUM KDEM GG
SUBJECT: TBILISI ELECTIONS UPDATE 01/22/2008

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Mikheil Saakashvili was sworn in as President of Georgia for a second, 5-year term on January 20. A military parade and gala concert by Jose Carreras marked the occasion, attended by U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gutierrez and other foreign dignitaries. True to their word, the United National Council of Opposition (UNC), led by defeated presidential candidate Levan Gachechiladze, rallied to loudly protest the inauguration at the Tbilisi Hippodrome. The New Rightists Party, which is not part of the UNC, also joined the protest. On January 22, the first of many expected personnel changes in government were announced. Most of the initial changes affect leadership in districts in the capital of Tbilisi. PM Lado Gurgenidze will submit the new cabinet of ministers next week. Koba Davitashvili (leader of the People's Party and UNC member) led a protest of several hundred people outside Embassy Tbilisi on January 22. The protest may indicate a pending split in the UNC, because none of the other opposition parties supported it.
End Summary.

Saakashvili Begins Second Term

¶2. (U) Mikheil Saakashvili was sworn in as President of Georgia for a second, 5-year term on January 20. Contrary to the UNC's demands, a military parade marked the occasion. 2,500 soldiers marched on foot, armored vehicles drove by, and helicopters flew over in formation. A gala concert was also held featuring Jose Carreras. U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gutierrez and foreign dignitaries from approximately 40 countries attended.

Opposition Protests Inauguration

¶3. (SBU) Embassy observers estimated about 10,000 people attended an anti-inauguration rally on January 20 at the Tbilisi Hippodrome. Opposition presidential candidate Levan Gachechiladze and other UNC leaders addressed the crowd, saying "Saakashvili is not our President." Gachechiladze also focused on the need for free media, truly independent election administration, and an independent and responsible judiciary. Without these, he said, "we will force Saakashvili to flee the country."

¶4. (U) Other leaders were even more outspoken. Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way) and MP Zviad Dzidziguri (Conservatives) both referred to Saakashvili as a "de facto President." MP Mamuka Katsiadze (New Rightists Party) went further, calling for a "political and moral disobedience campaign against the authorities." Former chess champion and member of Badri Patarkatsishvili's party, Nona Gaprindashvili, also addressed the crowd and said she too

"would refuse to recognize Saakashvili as President."

More New Faces Arrive in Government

¶5. (SBU) Saakashvili reiterated in his inauguration speech that he is planning a new, more-inclusive government. On January 22, the first of many expected personnel changes in government were announced. Many of the initial changes affect districts in the capital city. Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava announced his new Deputy, Zurab Arsoshvili (from the Adjara Ministry of Finance), and three new Sakrebulo (City Assembly) Chairmen in Tbilisi districts (including Tbilisi, Vake and Isani-Samgori.) (Note: It is important to remember that Gachechiladze received more votes in Tbilisi than did Saakashvili. End note.)

¶6. (U) Next week PM Lado Gurgenidze will submit the new cabinet of ministers to Parliament. At this time media sources report that Eka Sharashidze (head of the President's Administration) will become the Minister of the Economy. Sandro Kvitaishvili (a new face) could become the Minister of Health and Social Security, and Zurab Melikishvili (Regional Governor of Kvemo Kartli) could become the Minister of Environment and Natural Resources.

¶7. (U) Other media reports speculate that Davit Bakradze could become Foreign Minister, and Saakashvili insider MP Giga Bokeria could become a Deputy Foreign Minister, Ambassador to the U.N., or official envoy in Europe. Former Minister of Healthcare and Social Issues, Davit Tkeshelashvili, may be offered one of three vice-premier positions. Giorgi Baramidze, Minister of Euro-Atlantic Integration, is also seen as a likely replacement for Levan Varshalomidze, the current Head of the Government of Adjara. Other speculation reveals that recent Education Minister appointee, Maia Miminoshvili, may be replaced by Maia Panjikidze, current Ambassador to the Netherlands. Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili and Prosecutor General Zurab Adeishvili are both expected to retain their positions.

Protesters (Some) Gather Outside Embassy

¶8. (C) Koba Davitashvili (leader of the People's Party and UNC member) led a protest of several hundred people outside U.S. Embassy Tbilisi on January 22. Waving flags and banners, and holding signs, the protesters stayed for about one and a half hours. Some of the signs said "Why?" Others said "Bryzer - The Supporter of Anti-Democracy in Georgia" and "USA - Supporter of Dictatorship." Davitashvili said, "If not for the support of the U.S. government, falsification, fraud and violence would not have won in this country. This is the truth and we all know it." (Comment: In a January 19 meeting, Republican Party Chairman David Usupashvili told DAS Bryza and the Ambassador that Davitashvili was planning the demonstration. Usupashvili said that he and the UNC voted against Davitashvili and the protest. Only Jondi Bagaturia (Georgian Troupe) also supported the demonstration among UNC members. Despite a few UNC flags present, the UNC was against this event. Davitashvili told the other UNC members that he would hold the protest despite their misgivings and leave the UNC. Usupashvili said that this public split would be bad for the UNC, and he and the UNC majority were trying to determine a course of action. End comment.)

TEFFT